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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, April 14, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NATIONAL FORESTS FOR NATURE STUDY." Information from the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

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How many of my listeners, I wonder, have ever seen a wild deer? A forest supervisor once said: "If a tourist or a camper chances to see a deer in the woods, he will tell you that his vacation is a success."

And in 157 National Forests, scattered through some 40 States, he is more likely to see a deer. The U. S. Forest Service reports a deer population of 1 million, 442 thousand last year in all the forests taken together. Now I suppose some of you are wondering what deer have to do with homemakers' problems. Which brings me to the point I have in mind for today's talk.

The National Forests offer excellent material for those who are interested in Nature study, and that includes almost all the members of the average family who are not too decrepit to go into the woods and satisfy their curiosity about the things that grow. Their main interest may be flowers, or trees, or wild life large and small, even insects or geological formations. The National Forests are natural laboratories where each and all of these interests may be satisfied. For the family with growing children who are learning one or another of the natural sciences at school, much is missed if full advantage of the nearest National Forest is not taken to illustrate and supplement the class-room work.

Perhaps you can organize a nature class, with a teacher or older student to help with exploratory expeditions. Before the class goes into the forest for a day or a week-end to look for the particular nature forms that interest it, the leader should have the group do some preliminary reading and preparation, so that they will get the most out of the nature walk. For it's bound to be a walk, not merely an automobile ride, if the class is to come close enough to the botanical or wild life forms under observation, to learn anything about them.

I once knew some English people who belonged to a "travel club." None of them had over two weeks' vacation in a year. So in order to make the most of their vacations to previously chosen points of interest, they spent their winter meetings exchanging information on what could be seen and learned in the place they intended to visit. In this way their trips yielded a maximum of pleasure and profit, and the same idea can be applied to nature study groups, planning holidays in the National Forests.

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Deer are not the only "big game" animals which live in our forests, although they are the most numerous and most easily seen. In some of the western National Forests, the visitor might see elk, black or brown bears, antelope, bighorns, moose, a few grizzlies, mountain goats. There are peccary in 3 of the forests, and wild boars in two. Predatory animals like mountain lions, wolves, coyotes and lynx also live in certain of the National Forests, but the ordinary visitor is not likely to come upon these wary animals accidentally. Some of the fur-bearers, especially beavers, skunks and badgers are plentiful in some regions, and a leader who knows their habits might be able to guide a group of students to a part of the forest where they live. Harder to catch sight of, but still among the possibilities are raccoons, muskrats, foxes, weasels and other fur-bearers. It is possible to find out from the regional forest supervisor which species are in the particular forest you wish to visit.

In some of the National Forests, much is being done to help the nature enthusiasts. Nature trails have been specially constructed, leading to spots where particularly fine examples of flowering plants may be seen, or rare trees or evergreens, or birds of species native to the region. In some cases the trees have been tagged to show their species and other facts of interest.

In a forest inn on the Long Trail in the Green Mountains of Vermont, you will find a fine collection of specimens of trees and plants by which to identify the local trees, ferns, and other growing things. West Virginia maintains summer schools at the State University in which a preliminary study is made of rare native plants that grow in the Monongahela National Forest. When the student has made the acquaintance of these species in class, he or she is more ready to go out with a party and locate them where they actually grow.

Bird lovers everywhere know that they can find their feathered friends where the forest gives them shelter. Again, many of the forests have rock formations and mineral outcroppings of great interest to the geologist and mineralogist, whether amateur or professional. "Sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything," was never more truly said than of the nature uses of the forests.

Hunting and fishing in the forests are of course undertaken chiefly for sport and food. But both the hunter and the fisherman must be nature students in a way, for they must learn quite a bit about the kinds of quarry they wish to take.

And some mention should be made of the possibilities for photography in the forests. It may be in connection with nature study or it may be an end in itself. But the nature enthusiast is often a camera artist, and to get the fullest benefit from a nature trip, the student should certainly take his camera along. If he can't catch a deer with it, perhaps he can capture a little of nature on a grand scale- and bring home some fine views.
